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III. — *Apragopolis, Island-home of Ancient Lotos Eaters*

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SUETONIUS in his life of Augustus, after describing some of the emperor's occupations on the island of Capri, says in 98, 4: vicinam Capreis insulam Apragopolim appellabat a desidia secedentium illuc e comitatu suo. sed ex dilectis unum, Masgabam nomine, quasi conditorem insulae κτίστην vocare consueverat. huius Masgabae ante annum defuncti tumultum cum e triclinio animadvertisset magna turba multisque luminibus frequentari, versum compositum ex tempore clare pronuntiavit:

κτίστον δὲ τύμβον εἰσορῶ πυρούμενον.

conversusque ad Thrasyllum Tiberi comitem contra accubantem et ignarum rei interrogavit cuiusnam poetae putaret esse; quo haesitante subiecit alium:

ὁρᾷς φάεσσι Μασγάβαν τιμώμενον;

ac de hoc quoque consuluit. cum ille nihil aliud responderet quam cuiuscumque essent optimos esse, cachinnum sustulit atque in iocos effusus est. Then he begins the next section: mox Neapolim traiecit . . .

Now, if one knew nothing about the topography of the Bay of Naples, and were equally ignorant of the opinions of those who have thought that they knew something about it, he would be likely to translate this passage as follows:

"An island near Capri he called Apragopolis,¹ 'The Community of Do-nothings,' from the idleness of those who used to withdraw to it from his retinue. But one of his favorites, named Masgaba, he was in the habit of calling Ktistes, as if

¹ The definition in L. and S. Greek Lexicon *s.v.*, needs correction: "Castle of Indolence, Sans-Souci, as Augustus called his retreat in Campania." "Land or Community of Do-nothings" is preferable to "City of Do-nothings." See L. and S. *s.v.* πῶλις, II and III. Forester, in his translation of Suet., renders it "The City of Do-littles."

he were the first to found a settlement on the island.² Once when he had noticed from his dining-room that the tomb of this Masgaba, who had died the year before, was visited by a large crowd with many torches, he recited aloud a verse he had extemporized :

‘I am looking on a founder’s tomb aglow with fire.’

Then, turning to Thrasyllus, one of the suite of Tiberius, who was reclining opposite him and knew nothing about the matter, he asked of what poet he thought the line to be. As he hesitated to reply, Augustus added another verse :

‘Do you see the honor paid to Masgaba with torches?’³

and asked his opinion of this one also. When Thrasyllus could only reply that the lines were very good, whoever the author of them might be, he set up a laugh and fell to cracking jokes.”

But knowledge, or, in certain cases, half-knowledge of the actual setting of Capri has led scholars to offer much less natural and obvious interpretations than the above translation. Even the first three words of the Latin text have started disputes that still await a final settlement.

In spite of certain theories, it would hardly seem necessary to argue that the application of *vicinam* to *insulam* in relation to Capri makes it impossible to identify Apragopolis with any island fifteen to twenty miles away, Ischia, Procida or Nisida, nor with any of the Isles of the Sirens, Li Galli, which lie about nine miles distant on the other side of the Peninsula of Sorrento. Had it been as large as any one of the first three, we should expect it to have possessed some well-known name, which Suetonius would naturally give.

Scholars who have been unable to find an island close to Capri have felt free to imagine that there was one there two millenia ago, but that it has since been swallowed up by the

² It has escaped some scholars that *insulam* and *insulae* should be referred to the same locality. Cf. Holland, *Trans. of Suet.*, ed. by Whibley, I, 271.

³ Forester makes it a declarative sentence: “Honor’d with torches Masgabas you see.”

sea in some seismic disturbance, or that Apragopolis was either Capri itself or some part of Capri, *e.g.*, Anacapri.

Vesuvius, however, and its subsidiaries have enough to answer for without bringing any unnecessary charges against them. Nor can Capri as a whole be intended; for, in that case, we should have expected some sign between § 3 and § 4 that the historian had suddenly shifted his point of view back to the mainland, and there is not the slightest. The former section is obviously concerned with Augustus' life on the island, not on the Campanian coast, where, in fact, there is no indication that he sojourned at all from the day he sailed from Astura, until, finishing his four days on Capri, he then crossed from there to Naples. Therefore, no matter how easily you may dispose of a locative ablative *Capreis* between *vicinam* and *insulam*, where you would have expected either the genitive of the word or the accusative,⁴ Suetonius could not have had in mind the entire island.⁵

On the other hand, those who, seeing the impossibility of the interpretation "Capri, an island near the Campanian shore," make it mean "the neighboring part of the island of Capri,"⁶ have not only to wrestle with the same recalcitrant locative ablative, but also to find a parallel for the partitive use of *vicinam*, although, of course, a certain few⁷ adjectives of place and time are frequently so employed. Then, too, one asks what is the place to which Apragopolis is a neighboring part? If it is some residence of Augustus, why has not Suetonius definitely localized it in the Latin immediately preceding this section? The buildings of the emperor who boasted that he had found Rome of brick and left it of marble were perhaps numerous on the island.⁸ Capri was his

⁴ *Capreas* was proposed as an emendation by Torrentius. Such phrases as *in oppido Antiochiae* are, of course, not parallels for a locative accompanying an accusative. Shuckburgh, *Suet. Aug.* 169 n.

⁵ One could hardly attach any importance to the statement of the scholiast on Juv. 10, 93: *de qua insula Augustus ἀπραγόπολιν dixit quod ibi esset otii locus, ut ait Suetonius.*

⁶ The translation of Professor Rolfe in his *Suet.* 1, 279.

⁷ Lane, *Latin Grammar*, § 1249.

⁸ In view of the fact that Tiberius was *modicus privatis aedificationibus* (Tac.

ἴδιον κτῆμα,⁹ of which he might well have been called the κτίστης himself. That Masgaba, a freedman of African race, ever had anything to do with his villa-constructions¹⁰ is, however, a pure assumption of the editors.

And, after all, there is an island near Capri even to this day, Monacone,¹¹ the existence of which gives Masgaba's nickname its full measure of fun; for it is much too small a place to deserve the honor of a κτίστης, even had it ever possessed any permanent inhabitants at all. The circumstances under which such a lover of joking as Augustus might conceive the comical fancy of calling his favorite the colonizer of the island, and, if he was entombed there, even regard him perhaps as a sort of eponymous hero of the place, may be readily divined from the narrative of Suetonius.

The imperial villa was probably built on a cliff *Baiano more*, so that from a triclinium in it he looked down on the island far below. When day after day he had noted members of his party, under the initiative, it would seem, of Masgaba, withdrawing from the usual pursuits of Caprean life, to spend hours of absolute idleness in the seclusion of the *insula*, he named it Apragopolis, called the inventor of this novel diversion the κτίστης of the settlement,¹² and, when he came to die, honored him with a tomb on the spot he had made so popular. It was perhaps on the anniversary of Masgaba's death that his former companions in indolence were visiting the τύμβος with torches, a sight that inspired Augustus to test the prophetic insight of the astrologer Thrasyllus with extempore verses.

Ann. vi, 45, 2) and had compelling reasons for not introducing extensive building operations to the privacy of his island refuge (*Tac. Ann.* iii, 52, 2 and *Suet. Tib.* 47) Bötticher's interpretation of *Ann.* iv, 67, 5, *duodecim villarum nominibus et molibus insederat*, is convincing; Tiberius took possession of twelve villas, some of them, no doubt, the property of his predecessor, and renamed them as his own.

⁹ Strab. v, 4, 9 (248): τὰς δὲ Καπρέας ἴδιον ποιησαμένον κτῆμα καὶ κατοικοδομήσαντος.

¹⁰ Much less with populating Capri! See *Suet.* ed. by Bremi², p. 231, Schild, p. 308.

¹¹ The "Great Monk" still has a Roman tomb upon it (Baedeker, *Southern Italy*, 1908, p. 173), but alas! with no inscription to Masgaba.

¹² For *conditorem insulae* cf. Vell. Pat. i, 2, 3: insulam . . . Gadis condidit.

But objections have been raised against the identification of the *vicinam Capreis insulam* with Monacone because of the island's present barrenness and insignificance. Without, however, discussing the psychology that prompts, and, unless human nature has greatly changed, has always prompted members of a house-party or the like "to hunt some new place to go to," "to get off by themselves," "to take sun-baths, *apricari*, on rocks by the sea," etc., with no careful consideration of whether or not they will thus exchange a maximum for a minimum of mere physical comfort, I shall simply urge that Monacone two thousand years ago was without a doubt a much larger and so more attractive island than it is to-day.¹³

Why the commentators on Suetonius have not thought of this I cannot say; for many of them must have visited, for instance, the Blue Grotto, and had ocular demonstration of Capri's extraordinary change of level. This particular sea-cave was perhaps only twenty feet higher out of water in the first century of our era, as the ancient steps still indicate,¹⁴ but Günther, our chief authority on the rising and sinking of the land all around the Bay of Naples, which has alternated not with sudden shocks but slowly from time immemorial down to the present day, has demonstrated that the greatest changes on Capri have been at that eastern end¹⁵ of the island with which we are concerned. Thus from soundings he concludes that the rocky islets here once stood over forty feet higher above the surface.¹⁶ The diminution of Monacone and the Faraglioni and the change of character that such a subsidence might have brought need no comment of mine.

¹³ This deprives of force the exclamation of Schoener, *Capri*, p. 127: "Wer die etwas 100 Meter Umfang besitzende baum- und schattenlose Felsklippe gesehen hat, kann nur über die Vermuthung lachen, dass verwöhnte und genussliebende Hofleute sich hieher zurückgezogen haben sollen, um des dolce far niente zu pflegen!" And yet even now of the much more repellent rock near by he tells us: "Auf dem Süd-Faraglione hat man Olivenbäumchen, Schlangen und eine Eidechsenart von meerblauer Farbe gefunden." The vegetation of Monacone in its larger form may have been heavy.

¹⁴ R. T. Günther, "Earth Movements in the Bay of Naples" (reprint from *The Geographical Journal* for Aug.-Sept., 1903), pp. 10 and 18.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.* p. 18.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.* p. 8.

In conclusion, I would only suggest that we may now explain still another hitherto inexplicable passage in a writer of the first century A.D., Pliny the Elder.¹⁷ He tells us that the *cocleae* which come *ex insulis Caprearum* are *laudatae*. That plural *insulis* has led to serious tampering with the text,¹⁸ but in view of what I have already said it seems obvious that Capri's¹⁹ islands are simply Monacone and the Faraglioni in their ancient state, when even a megalomaniacal commentator would not have begrudged them the title of *insulae*.

Assuming once more that even two thousand years cannot radically change human nature, we may believe that it seemed to the Ἀπραγοπολῖται even more than ordinarily *dolce far niente* when they could watch the snail-gatherers laboriously collecting the *frutta di mare*, as the contemporary Neapolitans are still doing it to the entertainment of ἀπράγμονες ἀποδημηταί all around the Gulf of Naples.

¹⁷ *H.N.* xxx, 45: *laudatae et ex insulis Caprearum*.

¹⁸ Some, putting a comma after *insulis*, consider Capri simply a specimen of such islands. Cf. J. P. Miller (1766), J. G. F. Franzius (1788), G. Brotier (Valpy, 1826), J. Sillig (1835), C. H. Weise (1841), and Littré (1850). Sillig (1853) assumed that the name of another island had fallen out, and proposed *ex insulis . . . et Caprearum*, therefore, as the proper text. Janus (1858) printed *et ex insulis et Caprearum*, while D. Detlefsen (1871) preferred *ex insulis et Caprearum*. Old Philemon Holland blundered into what is almost correct when he translated: "There be good also brought from the islands Capreae."

¹⁹ The origin of the name Capreae must be left to the professed etymologist, who should consider the possibility that the large island with its islets figured originally as "The Wild Goats," *Capreae*. If one would argue that Capri received its plural name as being, as it were, a component of several parts (cf. the theories concerning such words as *Athenae*), the geological conditions that segregate Anacapri to-day from the lower Capri so sharply must come to mind. The derivation of a plural, *Pithecussae*, attached to still another island in the Gulf of Naples, is much mooted, and the appearance of a singular *Καπρίη* in Steph. Byz. *s.v.* (cf. *Frag. Hist. Gr.*, Hecataeus, 29), as the name of Capri itself depends upon an emendation, though a probable one, of *Καπριήνη*.